
Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): So sir, if
you're ready, the floor is yours.

CAPT. PINE: Absolutely. Thanks.

I appreciate the opportunity to chat this evening or I guess it's this
morning at your time. I am about one year, one week and a few days into my time
in Iraq, in fact getting ready to redeploy in about a week. So I'm talking to
you with the perspective of one year on the ground here in support of the joint
headquarters inside the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, and so that's the kind of
position I'm talking from as well as the chief of staff of the organization that
does the advising to the Iraqi joint headquarters.

In this past year in Iraq what I have seen is a tremendous improvement,
a large, you know, physical, measurable gain in the ability of the joint
headquarters to manage those myriad complex and challenging tasks that any
organization would face as they're growing. You know, in each case, they're in,
you know, year four plus developing this new organization. At the same time,
this fledgling military, which has only been around for a few years, is also
fighting a country-wide war.

So they've got dual challenges as we help them grow in capability, grow
in size, grow in just about every form and function, while at the same they're
fighting wars. And so that's a challenge that any organization would face, but
in the midst of it, with the help of some very good people on their side and
obviously the coalition on our side, we're driving them forward and we're making
measurable gains.

Their ability and their capacity now for further development,
organization, training, equipping, sustaining that Iraqi armed forces is better
by and large every day. Some days it's incremental, some days it seems smaller
or maybe stagnant at a time. But the trend -- and like I said, I've been here
over a year -- is a slow, steady improvement sometimes with the studder step
that you might imagine as you're trying to get something off the ground.

The bottom line is: They're working hard, we're working hard. We're
making huge improvements in capability and capacity in the Iraqi armed forces to
do their job. There is obviously plenty left to do. The challenges remain very
great and very complex ahead of us; but for the most part, I leave here after a

year with a very positive spin on the challenges that they've faced and overcome, but recognizing that the work here is by no means over.

And with that, I'll turn it over to your audience or your participants there and ready to answer your questions.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir.

David Elliott, or D.J. Elliott, why don't you get us started. Sorry about that.

Q Yeah, this is D.J. Elliott, The Long War Journal. I was looking at the Iraqi army enablers side, on their fires and their combat service support. And especially with combat service support, with all the new vehicles and everything they're getting, they're probably going to need brigade support battalions added into the equation. Right now only the 9th Division has those. Are they looking at doing that in the near future?

CAPT. PINE: D.J., what they're actually looking at is the building and development of the entire base support units for each division area. So each of the divisions -- the Iraqi divisions that exist now have -- there's a plan that's been agreed to at the end of last year that we're moving out on with the Iraqis for the development of the sites. So right now we do have regional support units that have capabilities to support the forces, but there's only five of those. And we're going to grow them all, increase the size of those where required and add in base support units to do just that, because as you pointed out, that combat service support, that enabler is a huge bit.

And by choice early on, the decision was to build the teeth -- you know, build that striking power and those combat forces. And that's super important, but obviously, as we know from our own experiences, to have that teeth and to have that capability, there's a very large tail in support. And our initial efforts in the years before I got here and the year I've been here have been focused on developing the teeth.

We are now focused on developing the tail to support that because along the initial stages here, the coalition has been providing much of that support, much of that tail. But the Iraqis understand what it is that they need to do, and in fact they're focusing hard upon that here in 2008.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jarred. Q Yes, sir. Since there are only a few of us, perhaps you could take a more generalized look at this and kind of give us some inkling into the specifics about the leadership on the Iraqi side; their motivation, their expertise, their competence; where you see the gaps being and how we would fill those gaps when it comes to basically creating the entire infrastructure which will be there as we continue to draw down, since clearly this is the most important component of everything we do. If we win just one day and then pull out and there's nothing left, obviously we're in bad shape.

So if you could talk a little bit about do you see enough competent people throughout Iraq to take over these positions? Do you see enough willingness on the part of the government? Just kind of for your own feelings to give us more of kind of a flavor about where we see the future heading.

CAPT. PINE: Sure, I'll do my best to fill that broad request.

I could tell you, my experience and my observations is direct at the joint headquarters level. So that's at the chief of staff, vice chief of staff and the deputy chiefs of staff inside the JHQ. So we're talking three-and-four-star-level officers.

Now, of real interest, that I think and in the year I've seen, Iraqi joint headquarters has changed its structure. Because at the beginning of the year, when I got here, they had a very Napoleonic look, which was much like our own Joint Staff, which was foreign to them. And they'd been working on it for years. But they changed their minds and made a decision that they liked the way they had done it before, which is with these four deputy chiefs of staff focused on personnel, logistics, operations and training.

And where you're driving to is that logistics piece. And the deputy chief of staff for logistics, Lieutenant General Abdullah, who before he had that job was the deputy IGFC commander, so the deputy ground forces commander. So he knows about how important the logistics tail is to support the teeth of the army out there in the field. And he is a motivated officer with a lot of initiative, with good ideas. In fact in his short time he's been in the job, he's made some significant changes.

I could tell you that I think that it's not the capability necessarily of the leaders specifically that we have seen perhaps as problematic as, what's so foreign to us is the mechanism by which they exercise control and therefore push decisions down. It's a very centralized control and centralized execution way of doing business in the Iraqi army which, as my understanding is, is quite common in this part of the world and in fact in many places, not just in the Middle East or Southwest Asia, unlike our centralized control, decentralized execution.

So they've got some really talented people at various levels. Do they have some officers that perhaps are not quite as exceptional as you'd like them to be in various places? I'm sure they have, because there's equality spread across, you know, the entire force, just like there is in any organization.

But the concepts are there. The idea of support to the troops is there. And the biggest think that we can do to help them is to continue to advise, coach, guide, mentor and influence our partners that are across the way, inside the joint headquarters, in terms of ways that we can help them do the things better, that they currently do, and to help them come to decisions on how to execute better. I can tell you, as a perfect example, they made a conscious decision back last fall. On 1 December, they were going to go life support self sufficiency. So thinking about how you're going to feed and water your troops and take care of the basic, you know, camp commandant kind of duties: provide water, provide blackwater treatment, trash haul and garbage, that kind of stuff, including the cooking of food and the serving of food.

And that was a decision that was made at the highest levels inside the Ministry of Defense. We looked at -- with a certain amount of trepidation as they made the call six days before the cut-off date, and while it was different than we would have done it and perhaps ugly in some places and not as efficient as you would have liked with kind of western-detailed planning we would do before we made a major change in how we do business, by every measure it's out there and it's functioning. Are there problems? Sure. Some places there are -- have managed it way better than others, but in the main the divisions, the training centers and the support centers actually are doing their life-support self-sufficiency quite well and on their own, completely managed by them with no

coalition input. That's just one piece of that whole logistics tail, but it's an important one.

One other thing that's done that I think is worth sharing is that the deputy chief of staff for logistics and the ammunition director, a major general, they both decided that one of the issues, because of the way the release authority goes for distributing ammunition to -- (inaudible) -- was a very cumbersome, paper-driven, many signatures required, had to go all the way up to the top to get signature and approval to release ammunition, which took a lot of time. Plenty of ammunition in theater, plenty of ammunition all over, but actually having a piece of paper that says, you know, unit X needs to draw Y amount of ammunition by Z time because they need it was a very cumbersome process.

We recognized that in the U.S. and coalition forces because we operate differently, but that's the way it was done in the old army and it's the way it's done in the new army. But the director of ammunition and the director -- deputy chief of staff for logistics said, you know, it's time consuming, it's a hard way to do business in the middle of a war, in the middle of battle. Let's see about trying to push that ammunition down to the lower units. So instead of it being a pull system, which is the way it has always been in the past, they're now beginning to execute a push system for the first and second line of ammunition. That is a huge change, a key change, if you will, coming a Navy guy; you know, I have that naval flavor. But it's a real change in how they do business, and that took some initiative, it took some creativity and probably it took a little bit of risk to try to -- hey, we're going to change how we've always done it. But they're in the process of executing that change, and we expect that to be hugely beneficial to the fighting forces in the field. MR. HOLT: Okay. David Axe.

Q Sir, hi. It's David Axe from the War is Boring blog. Thanks for taking the time to speak to us. So my question is, it seems to me that the Iraqi senior military leadership is -- doesn't seem intellectually and -- in terms of imagination doesn't seem equipped to conduct a complex counterinsurgency. What do you think?

CAPT. PINE: From the perspective of my personal observations, there are some very capable, very talented, very creative, very smart strategic operational and tactical thinkers inside the Iraqi headquarters. There's also some officers in there -- they may be very smart, very strategically minded, tactical thinking, but they're also products of their environment. And in the old regime, if you demonstrated initiative, good, creative thinking, the odds are it was going to come back and bite you and bite you hard. So there is a culture here -- and I don't just mean from the old regime of when Saddam was in charge -- but that the entire culture for many years, decades, I don't know how far back it is, but that's -- you know, that's my reading and my understanding is. No one likes to stand out from the crowd. No one likes to stand out. Everything's done via committee, via consensus, so that everyone can be blamed instead of one person being blamed if it goes wrong.

There are some very talented officers in the community -- in the various communities, both the Navy, the Air Force and the Army, and they're very capable. But there's also a fair number of folks that are there -- maybe it's longevity, maybe it's Peter Principle, maybe it's just they're afraid to, you know, rock the boat -- that you would think, well, why won't they make that decision or if only they could do this. And I think we're full of ourselves sometimes if we think it's because they don't have either the ability or the

desire so much as it's the ingrained habit patterns. And even in the new Iraqi army there's still concerns about stepping too far outside of the line.

Now, I will tell you, though, as a perfect example, the chief of staff of the Iraqi joint force, General Babakir, has been knocking around -- in fact, he has talked to his advisers and he has talked to MNSTC-I about a concept he wants to try to put in place, and it's -- it's a concept now -- of a strategic think tank to try to get some folks who have very creative minds, have to think outside the box, much like most of our four-star flag officers have in the U.S., where they have think tank, whether it's an internal or an external one like some of the big ones out there -- CSIS and what is it, Heritage Foundation -- that are think tanks that do that.

So the chief of staff of the Iraqi armed forces, that's something he wants to do. He hasn't figured out how to implement it, but that's the kind of creative thinking that top level leadership wants to do, but it has to break through the cultural barrier that they have in their own regime, in their own experience. But he sees a need to get additional creative minds helping to solve the problem, and not just the COIN fight. In the COIN fight, it probably doesn't take the -- you know, it's the people who can think well beyond that short, near target. You know, the Army parlance of the five and -- 25-year target, we need people out there thinking at the 200-meter, 300-meter range, and the chief of staff is trying to do that. At least this concept, what he's hoping to stand up probably addresses quite accurately what you just mentioned, sir.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay Somebody else joined us on the line. Who's there?

Q Yes. Hi. It's Richard Miller from Talk Radio News. How are you? Good morning, Captain.

CAPT. PINE: Hi, Richard. Good morning to you.

Q Thank you, sir. I'd like to ask two questions on two critical areas, at least as reflected in reporting on this side of the pond. The first has to do with security measures that are being taken to purify the force of insurgent elements that may be telegraphing tactical moves to the bad guys and hobbling some of your operations, on the new Iraqi army side, for sure.

The second is more of an affirmative action question in terms of what you see, how the Iraqi army is balancing the various ethnicities, some of whom may have conflicted loyalties. And I think the subtext of these questions are pretty clear, so I'll just shut up and listen to your answer.

CAPT. PINE: Okay, you bet. I'll tell you that the Iraqi army, for new folks joining the army, one of the things that happens is a vetting process, or a screening process maybe is more accurate, to verify that in fact the soldiers meet the minimum requirements, they do the very basics on literacy and health and physical and ages and things like that. And in the shape of the rejoining of old, former Iraqi army, you have a very intense vetting that's been done by their intelligence services that do all the research and look for reasons why these folks shouldn't be brought into the service.

And while your question is, of course, valid and of interest to all on both sides of the pond in terms of how do you validate or verify, you know, just

exactly how good an egg you've got coming into the service, at the present for the Iraqi army, new recruits, the level and fidelity of vetting, as we would consider it, perhaps, in our parlance, it is not as detailed.

Now, I will tell you as a perfect example every single Iraqi army soldier, NCO or officer, who gets a U.S. weapon, M-16 or an M-4, goes through a detailed biometric data collection on them. You know, they come in, they swap out their AK-47, they get an M-16, they get biometrics done. And in fact the Iraqi Joint Headquarters and the Ministry of Defense is hugely in favor of this and is supporting it completely, so that if these folks get a U.S. weapon, that's what they do, and they can track that data and they can do some very detailed, obviously, vetting of the Iraqi database. It's all Iraqi done.

Right now that whole concept of getting that kind of data on everyone in the service, in the Iraqi military, is a work in progress. Right now where it's done is at the issue of M-16s, but in fact one of the organizations here on the MNSTC-I side, the Coalition Army Advisory and Training Team, is in fact ordering these (kits/kids ?) to help the Iraqis do it at the training base so every single person joining the Iraqi army will get biometric data taken on them.

And this is exactly what's happening on the police side of the house, and it's been going on longer on the police side, as a way of trying to make sure they know what's going on with the kind of people that are entering the service.

So I would tell you that that's always a risk. And one of the things about counterinsurgency, there's risks in everything.

And as you probably know better than I do, from reports and all the research that you guys do, because I'm mostly at the headquarters level, not at the operational forces in the field level. But indeed, you know, if you have to get out in and among the people to do an effective counterinsurgency, you are, you know, increasing the level of risk for the fighting force. And that's both for, you know, coalition, as well as for the Iraqis themselves.

So, I will tell you, there is work involved, and the level of screening or vetting is different between a brand new recruit and a returning NCO or officer, because of the level of information that's available on them. But there is plans in place to increase that ability to help screen. But when you think about the size of the force and think about when we started doing this, it will take some time. And that's really -- I don't know much more about it than that.

You have a second question though. I'm sorry, I almost forgot about that. And that's the sectarian influence or sectarian biases that are out there.

Q (Off mike) -- Lebanon model, where the Lebanese basically draw, or at least during their salad days, tended to draw from Christian, Sunni and Shi'a in order to create an effective, you know, sort of pieced-off ethnic ticket, so to speak, in terms of running the country. And I'm wondering how the new Iraqi army is dealing with this.

CAPT. PINE: You bet.

The Iraqi army is, I was going to say concerned, but that's the wrong word. They're very intent on making sure they have a good spectrum, in proportion to the sectarian makeup of the country, and that this is an Iraqi army, not an Iraqi army with a Sunni this and a Kurdish that and a Shi'a this.

In fact, I've sat in on many of the senior selection boards. And it's very important at the highest levels, as they're selecting leaders of all the units, that they have an appropriate mix of all sects, so that there is not the occasion for a battalion, brigade, division, all the units in there to all be led by one leadership team or the other.

I'll tell you, the army is not -- it is national. They do recruit and they recruit in areas where the army divisions are. But it's deployable army, and they actually recruit folks from multiple areas that go to multiple areas.

So you might be recruited in the hometown of X at this recruiting center. You may get trained at a recruit training center Y and you may in fact get assigned to a unit Z. And they're not all next to each other in the exact same place.

Obviously, to a certain extent, if you recruit someone from, say, Basra, you're not going to send them all the way north to Al Kasik to train, up by, you know, at the far north, into the country. So there's a certain amount of, you're only going to travel so far between recruiting areas and training bases and the eventual units you assign, just from a pure physical, geometry point of view.

But they make a very conscious decision, especially at leadership and senior leadership, that they have a balance in the sect of all the leaders there. And, I mean, I've seen that at great lengths. It's in their, if you will, their board policy, before they do major promotions, for selections. It's a very critical piece that they take a lot of time and energy to make sure they get right.

Q Very good. Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay. We've got just a few more minutes left.

Anybody have any follow-up questions?

Q I do have a follow-up. This is D.J. Elliot again, sir. One of those things this reminded me of, supposedly there's a couple of KRG divisions that are supposed to transfer over to the Iraqi army. Are they going to break those up or something in order to make that its model, so to speak?

CAPT. PINE: Well, at one time -- and it hasn't been that long ago -- there was a lot of discussion about a couple of KRG divisions that would be shifted to -- (word inaudible) -- or transferred over to the Ministry of Defense to become regular Iraqi army, and the last thing I've heard on that -- and this is since before Christmas -- is that that has not developed any further. There was some initial meetings with some very high level folks from the Ministry of Defense, including the minister and leaders on the joint headquarters side, of talking up to KRG, and I think the answer was they didn't need to go out and bring in two new divisions of folks because of the level of equipment -- equipping that is up there with the KRG peshmerga is very light. And so if you're going to generate a force, while you might have a whole lot of soldiers,

you don't have a lot of equipment with those to protect the forces just by the very nature. They're not equipped the same as an Iraqi light infantry division or light infantry brigade or light infantry battalion. And this is just my guess or my assessment.

So I think when they started looking at just the complicated nature of it. It's not so simple to just grab two whole divisions, move them lock, stock and barrel and say, you know, presto chango they're now yours, Mr. Minister of Defense. In addition to having to pay for them -- you know, regular pay and allowances -- they've got to outfit them and equip them, and so it's -- I think the answer is just continue their -- the prime minister's initiative and force generation build of the desire of the Iraqi army in accordance with the service plan and the national military strategy.

So I think this just -- it was an idea that was raised, considered and has been on hold, and I haven't heard anymore about it since, like I said, before Christmas. Q Actually, sir, I think it's hung up because the legislation on the budget is part of the deal -- (inaudible).

CAPT. PINE: In the -- I don't know that for a fact. I know that the 2008 budget is still not through the Council of Representatives. I think it's up for its third and final reading, and it's out of my lane so I don't know anymore detail about it.

And sir, you could be right. I sure don't know.

Q A quick follow-up. Is there enough training at the command general officer level like a war college or command staff college for the colonels and lieutenant colonels who are going to be one-stars and two-stars to make sure that you keep regenerating the good work that's been done, you know, five, 10 years in the future now?

CAPT. PINE: That's a great question. They have a national defense unit -- university, and they have a senior staff college and a junior staff college. And the capacity is not all that great. It surely isn't the capacity that is in any of our services' colleges back in the U.S. But there's a huge study, in fact, going on right now -- joint study with both the Iraqis and MNSTC-I and, in fact, NATO training mission Iraq, where they're looking at both officer education and non-commissioned officer education -- two separate studies, in fact.

What's the existing capacity? What is the projected requirement for capacity? And what do the Iraqis need to do to increase, if that's required?

One of the biggest key things, I think, right now is that as they generated this force from scratch, as soon as you have officers that can be out there to lead, because I'm sure you are aware that the leader-to-led ratio is not where we would like it to be, not where it is in our service. But I will tell you, huge improvements in the leader-to-led ratio over the year 2000, very significant improvements in the number of Iraqi army NCOs and officers, to the tune of over about a 60 percent increase in both officers and NCOs in the year 2007, predominantly from former Iraqi army officers and NCOs rejoining, you know -- we call it rejoining -- into the new Iraqi army.

So leadership is a generational challenge, because obviously you can't make a leader. You've got to grow them, and it takes a lot of time. But your point about furthering the advanced education, military education of them, at

the junior staff college and senior staff college level, or the folks to be lieutenant colonels, colonels, brigadiers, is important, and they are doing it.

And I will tell you that the Iraqi army value that education tremendously. The problem is, when you're short leadership on the battlefield right now, it's real hard to cut officers out and say, we're going to take you out of the fight for one year, two years, three years to go to staff college, when you're short leaders out on the field, because we're growing this army so fast. They are doing the vast majority of the work because of the recruiting and the basic training and all the stuff that goes in there with, you know, the help from MNSTC-I as well. And it's by no means a small amount of help that we're providing to them.

But it's something for them to continue to focus on, and I know I have a senior adviser, a very senior Army colonel, who's the adviser to the deputy chief of staff for training. And that's one of the things that they've been looking at for a couple of months now, specifically about -- because the joint staff, both the senior and junior course are running now in their joint staff colleges. But it's a very small student pool if you will. So they're looking to see, how many more can they get in? Once they increase capacity, it may be required. How's that?

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Thank you, sir, and we're about out of time here. I'd like to thank you for joining us here at the Bloggers Roundtable. Captain David R. Pine, the chief of staff, Joint Headquarters Transition Team, from Iraq.

Thank you, sir, for joining us. Do you have closing comments for us, sir, or any final thoughts?

CAPT. PINE: Yeah, I do.

Like I said, I'm leaving here in about nine days after a little over a year on the ground. It's been an extremely challenging assignment but also very rewarding.

And I'll just wrap up to where, I think, what we have done as the Joint Headquarters Advisory Team, as part of the MNSTC-I mission which is, our focus all along has been to assist in the generation of Iraqi forces, the replenishment of those Iraqi forces and in the building of that institutional capacity at the joint headquarters level, which is what we do at Joint Headquarters Advisory Team, at the ministry of defense level, which is another one of the advisory teams here in MNSTC-I.

And the way we really do that is because our advisors -- we coordinate with all the folks in MNSTC-I for what we're trying to do with the ministry of defense, with the Iraqi armed forces.

And we're helping to push, advise, sometimes cajole, sometimes entreat, sometimes just suggest opportunities and ways -- other ways of perhaps doing those kinds of processes that lead to the functions of institution that will generate and sustain those combat forces. And like I said, the focus here in 2008 is on leader development and on the logistics tail to that combat arms warfighting tooth.

So that's where the focus is. The Iraqis have it. It wasn't us just saying this is what you need to focus on this year. They recognize it and know it. They recognize that over the last four-plus years, that it's been all about generation of fighting forces. But they know that they have to build those combat support and combat service support units, that they need to train new leaders, both at the NCO and the junior officer level, and enhanced training for the senior officers and the up-and-coming senior officers because they have to be self-sustaining.

And a final comment is, their leaders, they know that the COIN fight obviously is the most important thing right now, but they're not just looking three months, six months, nine months down the road. They're looking at, longer term, what's the size and capability of the force they need, because obviously they don't want to be in an armed state. They'd like the army to go do what armies do everywhere else, which is not control the internal security of the nation. They'd like that to be something that goes into the hands of the security forces, of the police. And so the army needs to focus on, okay, what happens after we win the COIN fight, as well.

So you got to have a near vision and you got to have that lobster eye so you can also look out there and down further. And that's one of the things that General Babakir is doing with his think tank. It's one of the things that the training guys are doing on their side for future advanced training at the Joint Staff Colleges at the junior and senior level.

So I see a lot of good. I really see them making huge progress from the year I've been on the ground, but I also see tremendous challenges still ahead. Nothing can be easy when you're still building the initial force and while you're fighting tooth and nail every single day. So the fact that the continued growth of the Iraqi armed forces, the surge of the U.S. forces that have helped really turn around and get a much more improved security environment, which therefore makes it easier to do the additional training, the additional capacity building, is all a good thing. And time will tell just how effective and how fast they can be at this continued growth and enhancement in their own abilities.

I guess that wraps it up. I thank you for the opportunity to talk to all of you tonight.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir. Captain David R. Pine, the chief of staff, Headquarters Transition Team, part of the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq. Thank you very much for being with us, sir.

CAPT. PINE: All right. Good night.

END.